

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – August 15, 2020 – Fr. Bryan Jerabek
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:30am Mass – 675 words

When Moses received the law of God on the mountain, he was also commanded to build the Ark of the Covenant as a fitting storage place for it. It was made of precious wood and covered inside and out with the purest gold; two angels were placed on top. The Ark was to be kept in the holiest part of the temple; it was also to be borne in procession as a harbinger of God's protection and victory. Ultimately, it came to be revered as the presence of God in the midst of his people. When, some 850 years later, the Israelites fell captive to the Babylonians and were marched into exile, and the Ark was definitively lost, this was the most crushing of defeats. They lost their homeland; moreover, the Lord apparently abandoned them.

What a surprise it must have been for any faithful Jew, then, to experience phenomena that recalled the ancient Ark of the Covenant many centuries later. Did Elizabeth think of the Ark as Mary came rushing to her in the Visitation and as John the Baptist leapt in her womb for joy – much as King David leapt for joy when the Ark came to him? And what went through John the Evangelist's mind as he had his apocalyptic visions, and saw the heavens opened – the true holy of holies – revealing the ancient Ark, which was then eclipsed by one other than the Virgin Mary, arrayed in gold, “clothed with the sun”? Yes, for as the Ark had suddenly disappeared, so did she, assumed into heaven body and soul at the end of her earthly life.

Often, when we speak about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we do so in terms of it being one of the special privileges that flowed from her divine motherhood. And all of that is true. But the readings for this feast give us another angle: that of foreshadowing. Every pious Jew might have nurtured some hope that the ancient Ark would one day be rediscovered and revered again in the Temple; little did they know that it actually had been but a shadow of the true reality, fulfilled in the Virgin Mary, who would be revered as the bearer of God's real presence in our midst, making a triumphal procession on earth and then leading us not to a temple built by human hands, but to the uncreated dwelling of God in heaven.

Yes, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the true Ark of God. She fulfills the words of King David in the responsorial psalm: “the queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold”, as she occupies the throne designated for her by God in heaven, where she reigns over heaven and earth and intercedes for us with the King. Because she had been filled with grace by God from the first moment of her existence and, preserved by that grace, never once sinned, her body should not suffer corruption. Thus it was taken along with her soul by the Lord at the final moment of her life. Like the ancient Ark she is hidden from us; but the Jews did not know where the ancient Ark ended up, whereas we know exactly where our Queen is.

Today, I am beginning a 54-day rosary novena. I will pray the Holy Rosary for three sets of nine days for our nation, our Church, and my own special intentions; then, I will continue praying it for another three sets of nine days in thanksgiving for however the Lord shall have answered those prayers, made through Our Lady's intercession. I will begin this novena publicly with a rosary immediately following this Mass; I invite you to stay and to join in prayer – and from there, to continue praying the rosary daily, whether you do it as a novena or not. These are the most challenging of times, but the Lord has not abandoned us. Our Blessed Mother, from her glorious throne in highest heaven, is always ready to hear our prayers and fight for us!